



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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Annual Restaurant Inspections Now Available Online

How does your favorite restaurant fare during inspections by local health officials? Now you can find out with the click of a mouse.

The Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department has started making food-service inspection records available on its website at www.LewisAndClarkHealth.org. You can find the link by going to Licensing and Inspections in the left-hand menu and clicking on Food Facilities.

The health department was able to create the online database after buying new software that allows sanitarians to conduct inspections electronically.

Inspection records have always been public information, but until now they've only been available by visiting the department in person at 1930 Ninth Ave. The online database holds records dating back to May 2012. Earlier reports are still accessible at the department.

"The most common question our inspectors get is 'Where's it safe to eat?'" said Laurel Riek, manager of the health department's Licensed Establishment Program. "This online service will answer the question."

Riek noted that other communities, including Missoula and Kalispell, have been making inspection reports available online for some time.

"Some places, like Salt Lake City, have been able to document that restaurants actually improved their compliance with food-safety requirements after the inspections became available on the web," she said.

The health department has four sanitarians who conduct unannounced inspections of close to 425 food-service establishments in Lewis and Clark County each year. A food-service establishment is defined as one that stores, prepares, packages, serves, sells, or otherwise provides food for human consumption in a mobile, stationary, temporary, semi-permanent or permanent facility or location.

The sanitarians look for practices that could cause foodborne illnesses or food contamination. The risk factors that most often lead to illness are:

- inadequate cooking or holding temperatures;
- employee hygiene, including handwashing;
- contaminated surfaces; and

- unsafe food sources.

Riek cautioned that an inspection report is only a “snapshot in time,” based on what happens during the inspection. It does not necessarily reflect the ongoing food-safety practices of a particular establishment.

“To get a more complete idea of how an establishment operates, it’s best to look at several inspection reports to see if food safety practices are improving,” she said. “A poor inspection can often prompt a restaurant to do better.”

The health department offers food-safety training periodically to managers and employees of food establishments. It also presents annual Gold and Silver Fork Awards to places that make exceptional efforts to develop good food-safety practices. The number of places getting the awards has grown each year.

For more information about the online inspection records or other food-safety issues, contact the Licensed Establishment Program at 447-8361 or healthinfo@lccountymt.gov.